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Staff
INFORMATION
May 19, 1970

MEMORANDUM FOR DR. KISSINGER

FROM: Arnold Nachmanoff

THROUGH: Viron P. Vaky

SUBJECT: Conversation with Ladislav Derka, First Secretary
of Czechoslovak Embassy, May 16, 1970

During a conversation at dinner at my house Saturday evening, May 16, Derka and I discussed the following subjects:

Vietnam-Cambodia

Derka commented that US prestige had suffered throughout the world because of the Cambodian action.

I said it was a difficult situation but the President had to do what he felt was necessary. I noted that the President had made very clear that the US wants to negotiate an end to the war and withdraw its troops from Vietnam as quickly as possible; I, therefore, wondered why North Vietnam, which obviously was suffering from the war, continued to refuse to seriously negotiate a settlement and facilitate the withdrawal of US troops.

Derka replied that there were various political forces involved--the Chinese Communists, the Soviet Union, and various factions within Hanoi. These forces see what is happening in the US--the dissent, the social and political tensions, the economic problems, etc. They feel that continuation of the Vietnam war permits the intensification of these "internal contradictions" in the US society. Thus, it is in the interest of "your opponents, such as the Soviet Union" to see the war continue. Moreover, the North Vietnamese are prepared to take losses and continue to sacrifice for another 20 years if necessary. Their people are psychologically prepared to wait it out. "They believe time is on their side, not yours."

I said it would be unfortunate if Hanoi and others based their policy on a miscalculation of the effects of dissent in this country. The

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CONFIDENTIAL

- 2 -

dissent is real and very vocal, but it represents a minority, not a majority. They should not underestimate the depth of nationalism in this country. Although the US, as a great power, can afford to be generous in negotiating a settlement, if Hanoi continues to remain intransigent, increases its attacks and inflicts higher levels of US casualties, there is real possibility of a nationalistic reaction in this country which would prove very costly and painful to North Vietnam.

Derka said he understood my point, but he wondered what the US could do--resume the bombing? I replied that that was not an impossibility.

After my comments, Derka twice asserted in rather definite terms that he did not believe the North Vietnamese or Viet Cong would launch any more major attacks.

Communist China-Soviet Union

Derka felt that there was some thaw in relations between China and the Soviet Union. He felt that the Kosygin-Chou En Lai meeting had been very significant in that an understanding had been reached to ease tensions between the nations although the "ideological war" would continue.

He believed that China would play a much larger role in the socialist camp in the next decade, a role which he believed would be "positive". He felt that China's progress, as compared to India for example, would enhance its prestige generally.

Cuba

Derka noted that his Ambassador had been in Nassau on his way to Havana last week (the Czechs represent Cuba in the US) when the Cubans called to ask him to return to Washington. The Cuban Foreign Ministry officials indicated they were "too busy" for consultation and that they wanted the Czech Ambassador to be in Washington at that time to represent their interests. (He assumed this had to do with Cuban concern over Cuban exile activities.) His Ambassador was annoyed by the Cuban action, but Derka commented that "this is the way the Cubans operate."

CONFIDENTIAL

CONFIDENTIAL

- 3 -

Derka raised the subject of the Cuban exile group, Alpha-66's kidnapping of 11 Cuban fishermen. He asked if I thought the fishermen would be released soon, but quickly added, of course "your government claims that it did not have anything to do with it." He said he had seen the State Department statement concerning our intention to apply the neutrality laws, but he commented that Castro does not believe that the policy of the State Department is the policy of the entire US Government. Castro knows that there are other agencies of the US Government such as the CIA, who are in constant contact with the Cuban exiles, and he believes that they give training and support to the exile groups.

I stated that I did not believe that the Alpha-66 activity was supported by any agency of the US Government, and pointed out that it was clearly not in the US interest to support or encourage the use of kidnapping. Derka, however, appeared to remain skeptical.

Czechoslovakia

Derka, who on previous occasions expressed sympathy for the liberalization movement in Czechoslovakia indicated his personal depression over events in Czechoslovakia in the past year. There was great disorientation among the people. He noted that these developments were now reaching into the Foreign Ministry and commented that no one at the Embassy including the new Ambassador knew what was happening and how long he would be staying at his post. (Derka himself is going back on home leave in July.)

Derka said he did not agree with the opinion that Gustav Husak had betrayed the nation. He felt that Husak did what he had to do under the circumstances. The Czechs moved too fast in too many areas and now they must wait--"the question is how long".

Derka expressed the view that in 1968 a significant factor in the Soviet decision to clamp down on Czechoslovakia was the fear among leaders of the Communist Parties in the Ukraine and in the Carpatho-Ukraine that the Czech liberalization would "infect" their areas. Derka said he believes that many Russians in various sectors were privately sympathetic to the Czech liberalization although they recognized that the Soviet system was not ready for such a development yet.

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